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Conversion Ruined

*The
New Perspective
and the
Conversion of Sinners*

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BRACHUS

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Scripture quotations, unless otherwise stated,
are from the New King James Version

Preach the word... for the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine... They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths

2 Timothy 4:1-4, NIV

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Introduction

It was said of Robert Murray M'Cheyne that when he preached you felt 'as if he was dyin' a'most to have ye converted'; that is, he wanted your conversion, there and then. That is what you felt. And you were right. M'Cheyne wasn't play-acting, putting on a show: your conversion *was* his consuming passion. He wanted you to be convicted of your sin, repent, and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting him to wash you in his blood and clothe you in his righteousness, and so have peace with God. To crown it all, M'Cheyne wanted this so badly you felt he would almost have died to get it.

'A bit OTT, isn't it?'

Not at all! Listen to Paul, in words which surely defy our ability to understand or explain:

I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh (Rom. 9:1-3).

Don't you think that it was Paul's example that gave M'Cheyne the stimulus for his eloquence?

We can take it further. What did the apostle so earnestly desire? What was it that drove him to such lengths? 'Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved' (Rom. 10:1). Saved! Converted! That's what he wanted: Jews to be saved. And not just his fellow-Jews. As he told the Colossians: 'Christ... we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. To this end I also labour, striving according to his working which works in me mightily' (Col. 1:27-28). This is what Paul was after. Sinners to be saved! Sinners to be converted! This is what he sought so earnestly.

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Now, wherever did Paul, in his turn, learn this vehemence and desire? Where did he get it? From whom did he learn it? He got it from God himself!

He met it, first of all, when Christ confronted him on the road to Damascus, and converted him, the Lord immediately spelling out his life's work from that time on, both as a believer and an apostle (Acts 26:15-18). I shall return to this. For now, I simply ask: at which school did Paul enrol in order to learn how to carry out this great commission from the Lord Christ?

Well, we know that he did not go to any man's seminary (Gal. 1:16-24). No! He went to the school of Scripture; that is where he learned to preach. It was there, when he was alone in Arabia, that God, by his Spirit, showed him how to preach. Not only that, the Lord gave him the grace to do it. And God used Scripture (the Old Testament) to teach the apostle.

Paul, of course, by his deep and long-standing acquaintance with the Old Testament, had known the book of Isaiah like the back of his hand. But now that he was regenerate, for the first time he was able to read the prophet's words with a true understanding. The veil had been lifted (2 Cor. 3:15-16); God had shined into his heart (2 Cor. 4:6). With open eyes, and an enlightened mind, Paul could now grasp what the prophet was talking about. He saw how God, picturing himself as a man, went about addressing sinners. And meditating upon that revelation, Paul was taught by the Spirit to go and do likewise.

What exactly did Paul discover, and where did he discover it in Isaiah? Listen to God himself speaking, first through the prophet, and then as quoted by Paul. Let the Almighty's words sink in. This is God speaking to men; God, I say, speaking to men, pleading with men as sinners: 'I have stretched out my hands all day long to a rebellious people' (Isa. 65:2), he declared. Staggering, isn't it? But so said God. Here we have the Almighty pleading with men, pleading with rebellious sinners! Paul, moved by this tremendous thought, quoted the words in question when writing to the Romans: 'All day long I have stretched out my hands to a disobedient and contrary people' (Rom. 10:21). Note the sort of sinners God pleads with: the rebellious, the disobedient, the contrary. Incredible!

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Clearly, this amazing revelation, newly-understood by the apostle, was etched deep in his mind and heart. So much so, he could never forget it. He was never the same again. From that moment on, he was a driven man, obsessed with this principle: ‘Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!’ (1 Cor. 9:16). It was this that compelled him throughout the rest of his life, as he never tired of letting people know:

I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to wise and to unwise. So, as much as is in me, I am ready to preach the gospel to you who are in Rome also. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek (Rom. 1:14-16).

Christ... [sent] me to preach the gospel... not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect. For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God... For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified... And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor. 1:17 – 2:2).

For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law towards God, but under law towards Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. Now this I do for the gospel’s sake (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

If ever a man lived out his dictum, ‘I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ’, Paul was that man.

It was no flash in the pan. As he was bidding his final farewell at Miletus, and knowing that imprisonment and worse awaited him, even then the apostle was still determined to go on pleading with sinners for their conversion. In his time, ‘Jesus [had] resolutely set out [set his face, NKJV] for Jerusalem’ (Luke 9:51,

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NIV). Paul now did the same, as he made clear to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:22-24).

Not only that. Throughout his ministry, Paul preached the gospel in the same way as God himself did; he was a ‘man of God’ indeed. Addressing Agrippa, for instance, the apostle’s words were all the more poignant by reason of the chains hanging from his wrists as he stretched out his arms to the man, looking for his conversion (Acts 26:1,29). Like his God, he stretched out his hands to the unconverted. And, like his God, he was moved in his heart towards sinners.

And that’s not all. Paul could call upon his own experience of Christ, could he not? Had not the Lord Jesus met him on the Damascus road? Had not the risen and exalted Lord shown him his power, along with his mercy, grace and love? Paul certainly saw it that way (Gal. 1:11-16; 1Tim. 1:11-16). He never forgot how the Son of God had dealt with him in that encounter. So much so, when he in his turn confronted sinners with the gospel, he did it with all his being, preaching Christ to them – stressing Christ’s power to save, and offering sinners the same mercy, grace and love of Christ that he himself had found.

Moreover, he had the moving example of the Lord Jesus who, when he was on earth, had been a preacher. In writing his Gospel, Mark, introducing Christ to us, recorded that ‘Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel”’ (Mark 1:14-15).

And how did the Son of God preach? Paul discovered it in the book of Proverbs – wisdom personified standing in the public square, calling out to men (Prov. 1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6). Now regenerate, the apostle could see that this portrays none other than Christ in the new covenant (1 Cor. 1:24,30). Wisdom (Christ), calling to men, freely offers them all his benefits, pleading with them to receive them. They refuse! Wisdom responds, spelling out the dreadful consequences of their refusal: ‘But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand...’ (Prov. 1:24, NIV). Do not miss the vital point. Note how Christ pleads with men, stretching out his hand, and this, of course,

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not to smite, but to save – as he showed beyond any vestige of doubt when he was here among men.¹

Coming to his preaching at that time, listen to the Lord Jesus in full flow; feel the passion in his words:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! (Matt. 23:37).

And we know why the Saviour pleaded with sinners in this way:

As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved. He who believes in him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God (John 3:14-18).

Note it well: ‘God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved’. The final judgement is certain, yes, but mercy was God’s great purpose in sending his Son into the world. And when Christ preached, he made this crystal clear. We know what Christ wanted his hearers to do. We know what he offered them. We know what he commanded, invited and exhorted them to do, what he pleaded with them to do:

Come to me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle

¹ Proverbs sets out the principles of gospel preaching very clearly. The preacher is Christ himself (1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6), using his ministers (all his people) (9:1-6); the offer is to all (1:20-22; 8:1-5; 9:3-6); the benefits offered in the gospel are spelled out (1:24,33; 8:5-35; 9:2,5); but the warnings against refusal are made equally clear (1:22-32; 8:36); and all is with passion, uplifted voice, and stretched out hand (*passim*). In addition to the references in the main text above, see Isa. 55:1-13; Matt. 22:1-14; 23:38-39; Luke 13:34-35; 14:15-24; 2 Cor. 5:11 – 6:2.

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and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

This is the school where Paul learned what he had to preach, what he had to preach for, and how to do it. These were his teachers. This is the kind of curriculum he mastered – or, rather, which mastered him. This is what made him the man that he was. This is what made him the compulsive preacher he was. This is what made him burn with love for lost sinners, and stimulated him into making him passionate in his appeals to them.²

Shouldn't every believer want to attend the same school and be taught the same lesson by the same master? Shouldn't we all want to be fired by the same love, the same passion?

In light of the many testimonies in the Scriptures – Psalm 2:10-12; Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:1-11; Isaiah 45:22; 55:1-3,6-9; 65:2; Ezekiel 33:11; Matthew 22:1-10; Luke 14:16-24; John 6:29; Acts 17:30; Romans 2:4; 2 Corinthians 5:18 – 6:2; 1 Timothy 2:3-4; 2 Peter 3:9; and so on – we can be left with no doubt whatsoever: God himself desires the conversion of sinners, and works in his ministers to call them to Christ to be saved. As Paul could so movingly assert: 'Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God' (2 Cor. 5:20).

All this applies to all believers today. All believers are ministers of the new covenant. There are no exceptions! I will not stop to establish the point here – see my *The Priesthood of All Believers* for that – but, I say it again, all believers are new-covenant ministers, and all preach. But, of course, I am now using 'preach' in its fullest and widest New Testament sense. Not all believers can engage in what we might call 'pulpit work'. Obviously not. Nevertheless, each and every believer *is* a minister of the new covenant, and every believer *is* a preacher of 'the glorious gospel of the blessed God' (1 Tim. 1:11), one who has the privilege and the duty 'to testify to the gospel of the grace of God' (Acts 20:24).

² I do not, of course, use 'appeal' in the revivalist sense.

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Well then, how should we believers go about it? Whenever we get the opportunity to speak to sinners – whether in public or in private, in a pulpit or not – all of us who are believers ought to be moved by the same desire as the apostle, the same desire as the incarnate Christ when he was preaching, the same desire as God himself displays today. Do you ask what that desire is? Nothing less than the salvation of sinners, the salvation of all who hear us!

Every believer, therefore, should be ‘a driven man’. Knowing the terror of the Lord, and being compelled by the love of Christ, we, too, should long for sinners to come to Christ. We, too, should seek to persuade them to repent and believe (Luke 14:23; Acts 18:4; 20:21; 26:28-29; 2 Cor. 5:11,14). In short, we, too, should want them to be converted. And we should make no bones about it. *All who know us should realise that this is what we want for them.*

In short, may all who know us be able to point the finger at us and say, as they said of Robert Murray M’Cheyne: ‘This man, this woman, “preached [to me] as if he [or she] was dyin’ a’most to have me converted”’. I rebuke myself in saying it, of course, but I let it stand. It is nothing less than the truth.³

At any rate, reader, this is what lies behind all that I set out in this volume. This is what I intend to develop in the pages which follow. I am concerned here with the conversion of sinners. Nothing could be more important. I am convinced that each one of us is born a sinner, each one of us is by nature under the wrath of God, and, each one of us, unless we are converted, will perish eternally (John 3:18,36; 5:24-29; Acts 17:30-31; Eph. 2:1-3; Heb. 9:27; 12:25; and so on). We must be converted!

But the doctrine of conversion is being threatened in these dark days. I realise, of course, that Satan is always attacking on this front. He knows that if he can stop men preaching for the conversion of sinners, he will be taking a big step towards keeping them on the high road to perdition. Yes, that is true. Satan is always trying to undermine conversion; he is never off duty! Nevertheless, he is certainly very active at the moment, and the

³ See both my *The Gospel Offer is Free* and my *Septimus Sears* for much more on this.

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biblical doctrine of conversion is under heavy and sustained attack in our day. And I am deeply concerned about it.

So serious are the consequences of these attacks – consequences which are eternally dire for sinners – I must do what I can about it. With that conviction pressing on my heart and mind, I have taken up my pen to produce this book. This is what motivates me. My book represents the latest effort to do what I can to maintain, promote and encourage the biblical doctrine of conversion. More, I want to encourage all believers who read my words – I including myself – to be more earnest than we often are in our addresses to sinners.

Indeed, let me take a dose of my own medicine, and take it here and now. If any unconverted person is scanning these pages, my desire is that you, through reading what I say here, might be brought to Christ. Reader, I have to tell you, unless you repent and trust Christ, you will eternally perish (Luke 13:3-5). But, I am delighted to assure you, Christ stands both willing and able to save you – even at this very moment. Call upon the name of the Lord, therefore, and you will be saved (Rom. 10:13). I urge you to do it. I urge you to do it now!

Ultimately, of course, as in all else, it is the glory of God that is at stake; that is what is under attack in the threat to conversion. And it is the glory of God which counts (Matt. 5:16; 6:13; 9:8; John 5:23; 9:3; 11:4; 13:31-32; 14:13; 1 Cor. 10:31; 1 Pet. 2:12; 4:11,16; and so on). ‘The glory of God’ is one of the great phrases in all Scripture – try putting it into a concordance search-engine, and see! Why, God has been pleased to describe himself as the Glory of Israel (Hos. 4:7, NIV)!

The glory of God! Above all, it was for his glory that God sent his Son into the world. It was for the glory of God his Father that Jesus came and died. And it is for the glory of God that the Holy Spirit convicts and converts sinners today. It is in this way, supremely, that the triune God is glorified. The Lord Christ, in his high-priestly prayer, expressed it thus:

Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son also may glorify you, as you have given him authority over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ

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whom you have sent. I have glorified you on the earth. I have finished the work which you have given me to do. And now, O Father, glorify me together with yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was (John 17:1-5).

And hear the apostle:

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus' sake. For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:1-6).

Reader, in light of this biblical emphasis on the glory of God, there is only one ultimate motive that I can have in casting this volume out into the world. The everlasting good of sinners is, of course, a powerful motive in its own right. And righteous indignation at the assault upon any doctrine of God is surely a worthy emotion. But it is, above all, the glory of God which matters. And the glory of God is what I most desire in producing the book now in your hand.

Slim the volume is, I grant you, but, even so, may it prove to be a blessing far beyond its size. May it indeed 'punch above its weight'! May many have cause to thank God that it was ever published!

Conversion Threatened

The biblical doctrine of conversion is being threatened. It has been under attack since the days of the New Testament. It is always thus. Satan knows that this doctrine has to fall if he is to maintain his hold upon men and women. He must not allow them to be converted! That is why he makes sure that the conversion of sinners is always under attack.

Sometimes the threat is frontal and sharp, open. At other times, it is more a question of subtle drift, insidious. Nevertheless, conversion is always being attacked or undermined. We see it on all sides.

I can see the damage caused to conversion, for example, in the doctrine and practice of infant baptism – especially, *but not exclusively*, when it is associated with baptismal regeneration. When people think that because they were born to a believing parent who had them sprinkled as a baby, it means that they are in covenant with God, the biblical doctrine of conversion becomes an inevitable casualty. Millions have been deceived by the idea. Many go the whole hog and think that when they were sprinkled they were regenerated and made a child of God in that act. An ordained minister pronounced it so, and since age-old tradition and complicated (not to say mystifying) logic buttress it, then it must be right! At least, millions believe it is. It is a Satanic master-stroke. What of conversion in such a system?

I can see the threat to the conversion of sinners in the rise of sacramentalism among the Baptists. When people imagine that by immersing a person in water they convey grace to that person, then the biblical doctrine of conversion is seriously at risk. Baptism and conversion coalesce in such a system, and baptism must, in time, come out as top dog.

I can see the attack on conversion in the increasing emphasis among evangelicals upon inclusivism, whether by design (saddlebackism, to coin a word) or by default. What am I talking about? I am thinking of the growing number of churches which use carnal methods to attract and hold unbelievers; then, having got them, they treat all and sundry as believers. In such a system, the

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unconverted are encouraged by every aspect and ambience of the service to feel that they are included, no questions asked – especially when the preaching seems to be designed to do everything to avoid making them feel the slightest twinge of discomfort over their sin. Under such circumstances, it is no wonder that the biblical doctrine of conversion is masked, and worse; we should not be surprised when – not if – conversion dwindles to become virtually meaningless, just a social rite of passage.

I can see the danger to conversion when evangelical and Reformed preachers do not preach the gospel. What? Evangelical and Reformed men not preach the gospel? Unthinkable! Well, yes, it ought to be. But, for instance, I recently heard a sermon by a Reformed Baptist minister in which he did not mention Christ once. Not once! The gospel was not remotely preached on that occasion. It was not even broached. In fact, the sermon amounted to salvation by works. If it had not been for some excellent hymns, we were close to experiencing the complaint before the Great Awakening: in those days it was often impossible to tell whether an Anglican preacher was ‘Confucian, or Moslem, or Christian’. And it was said there were three degrees of preaching – ‘dull, duller, dullest’. Sadly, I am not talking about a State Church man preaching in the 1730s. My complaint concerns a Reformed man, an evangelical man, now! What is more, I know, as he knew, that there were some unconverted sitting in the congregation. Reader, the doctrine of conversion is not so much under attack when this happens; it is simply being allowed to wither and die!

I can certainly see the dreadful threat to conversion in preaching which tends to Sandemanianism. What is that? Sandemanianism is the teaching that saving faith is entirely a matter of the head; all one has to do is to accept the facts of the gospel; if you accept the facts of the gospel, you will be saved. Now, incipient or unwitting Sandemanianism is far more common than many realise. What am I talking about? When men lecture, and not preach; when men describe the gospel, and do not actually drive it home; when men, in effect, encourage their hearers to accept the facts of Scripture, and that is all – then, to put it mildly,

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conversion is seriously threatened. And this kind of ‘preaching’, I say, is far more widespread today than many will allow.

Wherever we find such things as these, I say, we soon discover that the biblical doctrine of conversion has been mortally wounded.

But none of these threats to conversion are what I have in mind at this time.⁴ They are real. They are not figments of my imagination. But they are not my main concern here. Rather, I am thinking of another attack on biblical conversion. I have in mind that threat to conversion which arises when the doctrine of justification by faith is tampered with. And the doctrine of justification by faith is being tampered with today, make no mistake about it; and in more than one way. The particular attack upon justification I am thinking of here is that which comes about through the teaching of what is known as ‘The New Perspective on Paul’.

But before I get on to the threat to conversion stemming from the rise of the New Perspective, with its re-writing of the biblical doctrine of justification by faith, let me for a moment come closer to home. I speak as a Reformed Baptist, and I want to have a word or two with my fellow evangelical and Reformed believers on the subject of justification by faith; a friendly word within the family, as it were. Too often we – and I am sorry to have to admit that I have to speak for myself as well as others, perhaps more than many others – we, I say, have suffered from too low a view of justification by faith: we have allowed it to morph into little more than a legal nicety. We have been too cramped, too dry, too academic in our thinking about this great and glorious biblical doctrine. As a result, our experience as believers has been sadly diminished. Not least, the doctrine of conversion has suffered. Looking into this will prepare us when we get to grips with the New Perspective and its effect on conversion.

In the following chapter I will go into this.

⁴ Apart from Sandemanianism, I have written on these other matters in previous works, which see. As for Sandemanianism, so seriously do I regard the matter, I intend to publish on it.

Justification by Faith

As I say, too often we believers – I am speaking of evangelicals and the Reformed – have adopted a view of justification which does less than justice to the weight of scriptural teaching on the subject. And this has had very serious consequences. Let me spell out what I am referring to.

Despite what I said in closing the previous chapter, Justification, according to the Bible, *is* God's legal pronouncement about his believing people. In Christ he does declare them righteous, he does account them beyond condemnation, and he does it by imputing to them the perfect obedience of the Lord Jesus Christ. The scene really is the law courts. This is how the Bible pictures it for us. God the judge pronounces the guilty justified on the basis of the finished work of Christ. So says Scripture. Of that, there is no doubt whatsoever.

Moreover, because we have been rightly determined to preserve this biblical truth, we have especially wanted to distance ourselves from the Roman Catholic notion of justification. And to say so! Quite right too! Romanists claim that justification involves much more than a legal declaration by God that the believer is righteous in Christ. Those who are justified, they claim, are actually and inherently in themselves made righteous. In other words, it is not only a question of imputed righteousness, but it is a matter of imparted, inherent righteousness. So says Rome. In saying this, Rome is grievously mistaken. Scripture is decidedly against her. The Roman notion is not only false, however. Although I will not expand on it here, the Roman doctrine brings many fearful consequences in its wake.

The point I am driving at is this: in light of all the importance of justification by faith, we have been right to confront Rome over the issue. Even so, in properly reacting against Rome, we have tended to lay so much weight on God's legal verdict in justification, that we have forgotten – or at least played down – the glorious truth that as justified believers we really are righteous, really are sinlessly perfect before God in Christ, utterly and irrevocably beyond condemnation. Not, I hasten to add, that we as

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believers are sinless in ourselves. But, in truth, we as believers *are* completely washed free of all sin in the Redeemer's blood, and *are* fully clothed in the perfection of Christ's righteousness. This is what justification by faith means. It is a legal truth, a forensic declaration by God about us as believers, yes, but we, through faith, truly are 'made righteous' in Christ (Rom. 5:19). This is a reality. It is not a figment. It is the biblical truth about us as believers. We, as believers, can say with confidence that God made Christ 'who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him' (2 Cor. 5:21). We can say with assurance that God in Christ did this so that we, 'not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing... should be holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:27). And all of it hinges on the fact that 'by one offering he [God in Christ] has perfected [us] for ever' (Heb. 10:14). Oh yes, these things are true, these things are real, these things are actual, for all of us who are in Christ by faith. The blood and righteousness of Christ accomplishes all this for us. In ourselves, we are sinners; in Christ, we are for ever beyond condemnation.

This is not the place for me to develop the doctrine of justification; a few scriptures (including repeats of the brief citations just given) must suffice:

Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God... For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly... God demonstrates his own love towards us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by his life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation... For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man's obedience many will be made righteous (Rom. 5:1-19).

[God] made [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21).

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Christ... loved the church and gave himself for her, that he might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word,⁵ that he might present her to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish (Eph. 5:25-27).

By [the] will [of God] we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all... This man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till his enemies are made his footstool. For by one offering he has perfected for ever those who are being sanctified (Heb. 10:10-14).

That, I say, is just a sample. And the bulk is every bit as good as the sample.

Now, what are the consequences of this free justification in Christ? What can we say about *that*? The consequences are immense. In short, justification by faith makes the believer rich beyond words to describe. The benefits of free justification include his glorious liberty in Christ, his inexpressible joy, and his irrepressible zeal for his sanctification out of gratitude for the love and grace God has shown him in his Son. And more; much more. Yet again, the merest sample of scriptures must suffice:

If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed (John 8:36).

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?⁶ Therefore we were buried with him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of his death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of his resurrection, knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him... Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in

⁵ This has nothing to do with water baptism; see my *Baptist Sacramentalism*.

⁶ This has nothing to do with water baptism.

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Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace (Rom. 6:1-14).

Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another – to him who was raised from the dead, that we should bear fruit to God. For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death. But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter (Rom. 7:4-6).

There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: he condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit (Rom. 8:1-4).

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free (Gal. 5:1, NIV).

The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for himself his own special people, zealous for good works... When the kindness and the love of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,⁷ whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that having been justified by his grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. This is a faithful saying, and these things I want you to affirm constantly, that those who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works (Tit. 2:11 – 3:8).

⁷ This has nothing to do with water baptism.

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Though now you do not see him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls (1 Pet. 1:8-9).

Once again, the bulk is as good as the sample.

In light of these and many other passages of the New Testament, I have no hesitation in saying that we evangelicals and Reformed need to take a higher view of justification than we commonly do. Justification, I say again, *is* a forensic declaration about believers by God, yes, but justification is more than a legal nicety; much more. God really does see his people as in Christ – and, therefore, he sees us as sinless, as perfect, as Christ. And this, it surely goes without saying, ought to give us an exuberance, an exhilarating sense of joy, a transforming sense of liberty in the presence and service of God. Sadly, our view of justification is often stunted – with a corresponding diminishing of our sense of confidence and our joy and liberty in Christ. Too often we live as spiritual paupers when in truth we possess wealth beyond measure. Alas, we have become far too dry, too shrunken, in our view of our free and full justification by God’s grace in Christ.

And one of the casualties of our low view of justification is a low view of conversion. In fact, the drier our sense of justification, the more inclined we are to Sandemanianism – which, as I have said, is one of the great curses of the church today, and is having a withering effect on conversion.

Let Augustus Toplady remind us of our wealth:

*How vast the benefits divine
Which we in Christ possess!
We’re saved from guilt and every sin
And called to holiness.*

*’Tis not for works which we have done,
Or shall hereafter do,
But he of his abounding love
Salvation does bestow.*

‘How vast the benefits divine/ Which we in Christ possess!’ Quite! Isaac Watts had already used the word ‘vast’ when thinking about the same theme:

Justification by Faith

*How vast the treasure we possess!
How rich thy bounty, King of grace!
This world is ours, and worlds to come;
Earth is our lodge, and heav'n our home.*

*All things are ours: the gifts of God;
The purchase of a Saviour's blood;
While the good Spirit shows us how
To use, and to improve them too.*

Vast, vast benefits, vast treasure, and all in Christ – for all who believe! No wonder Watts went on to sing:

*I would not change my blest estate
For all the world calls good or great;
And while my faith can keep her hold,
I envy not the sinner's gold.*

Watts got it, of course, from Paul:

All things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come – all are yours. And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's (1 Cor. 3:21-23).

We believers need to reclaim this sense of our treasure in Christ, and do so as a matter of urgency.

Nevertheless, real though it is, as I have explained, the diminished view of justification by faith, so prevalent today among us evangelicals, is not my main concern here. Rather, I wish to take up that attack upon justification which comes from the teaching of the advocates of the New Perspective, and the consequent effect it has upon the doctrine of conversion.

Before I get to that, however, a word or two on 'conversion'. That will be the topic of the following chapter.

Conversion Defined

Conversion. I will be brief, but we need to know what we are talking about. In addition to what I have said in pervious pages, let me summarise what the Bible teaches regarding this matter of conversion.

The picture is clear. Sinners hear the gospel preached. They come under the conviction of their sin. They cry out to Christ in repentant faith. God imputes to them the righteousness of Christ. They are justified. Their lives are utterly changed. They begin to live out their new life in Christ by way of progressive sanctification. Thus they show that they must have been born again (John 3:3-8), that they have been taken out of Adam and put into Christ (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22,45-49). In short, they are converted, and they have a new attitude, a new mind, a new will, a new heart, a new desire, producing a corresponding change of life. Obviously so – since regeneration is a renewal; indeed, a re-birth – it can be nothing less than a momentous change! This is conversion. And it is essential. Until a sinner is converted, he will live and die – and spend eternity – under the wrath of God.

The following scriptures – merely a sample – set out the meaning of the word clearly enough:

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor. 5:17).

This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness [have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, (NIV)] with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard him and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, putting away lying: ‘Let each one of you speak truth with

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his neighbour', for we are members of one another... Do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil. Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma. But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord (Eph. 4:17 – 5:10).

We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, who also declared to us your love in the Spirit. For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of

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the Son of his love, in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:3-14).

We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father, knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God. For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in much assurance, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake. And you became followers of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith towards God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come (1 Thess. 1:2-10).

To my mind, a man has to be deliberately blind if he cannot see it. If I may accommodate Christ's complaint to the Jews (John 5:40), I put it bluntly to all such: 'You are not willing to see'.

At any rate, this is what I mean by 'conversion'.

Conversion Ruined by the New Perspective

Having cleared the decks, we are now ready to explore the devastating effect the New Perspective has on conversion. I do so by reference to Tom Wright's book: *What Saint Paul Really Said*, Lion Publishing, Oxford, 1997, Wright being one of the leading advocates of the New Perspective.

Let Wright set out his stall:

Justification... is not a matter of how someone enters the community of the true people of God, but of how you tell who belongs to that community... not so much about 'getting in'... as about 'how you [can] tell who [is] in'. In standard Christian theological language, it [isn't] so much about soteriology as about ecclesiology; not so much about salvation, as about the church... Justification... is not 'how you become a Christian', so much as 'how you can tell who is a member of the covenant family'... Justification is not how someone *becomes* a Christian. It is the declaration that they *have become* a Christian... The doctrine of justification by faith is not what Paul means by 'the gospel'. It is *implied* by the gospel; when the gospel is proclaimed, people come to faith and so are regarded by God as members of his people. But 'the gospel' is not an account of how people get saved.⁸

This extract, I think, more than amply confirms what I am saying: a wrong view of justification leads to disastrous changes to the biblical doctrine of conversion. And we are talking about an unbiblical view of justification by faith, make no mistake.⁹

⁸ Wright pp119,122,125,132-133, emphasis his.

⁹ I will not further substantiate this here. It has been done times without number. See, for instance, the following articles in *The Banner of Truth*: Kenneth D.Macleod: 'Justification' (07/01/2011); Maurice Roberts: 'A Brief Interview...' (02/03/2007); 'The New Perspective...' (21/03/2006); Ligon Duncan: 'Do we need a new perspective on justification?' (11/08/2005); James W.Galyon: 'Retreating to Rome' (05/12/2003). And there is no end of other works on the subject.

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Wright goes on to speak of those who, as he puts it, are ‘justified without knowing it’.¹⁰ This takes us to the heart of what I am talking about. Justified without knowing it? Reader, glance again at the various passages of Scripture I have quoted. Do they not teach us that a sinner is only justified when he repents of his sin, turns to Christ in faith, and is thus converted? None of this can possibly take place without the sinner ‘knowing it’! I agree, of course, that justification through faith is an act and declaration by the triune God, but the notion that the sinner can be converted, and thus actually justified in experience, while the sinner is in some sort of semi-comatose state, is utterly foreign to the New Testament.

True, God decreed the justification of the elect in eternity. True, Christ accomplished the justification of the elect in his death and resurrection. But equally true it is that the elect are only actually justified as they come to faith in Christ and are united to him. No passage, perhaps, captures all this better than the first chapter of Ephesians:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world... He predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ... In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment – to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And

¹⁰ Here is a clear link with infant baptism. The sprinkled infant – who can have no possible understanding of what is supposed to be happening – is allegedly regenerated – or at least brought into the covenant (whatever that may mean) – by the act of sprinkling (if not by his birth). As I showed in my *Baptist Sacramentalism*, advocates of the New Perspective see baptism – especially of the infant variety – as a key player in their scheme, especially in their drive for the ecumenical.

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you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession – to the praise of his glory (Eph. 1:3-14, NIV).

Now it is this actual justification by faith that we are talking about. *That* is the issue here. And no sinner is justified by faith 'without knowing it'!

Wright continues: 'One is not justified by faith by believing in justification by faith', he says. I pause. Of course not! This is not the teaching of the Bible.¹¹ One is justified by trusting Christ! But, having got off on that irrelevant foot, it is not at all surprising that Wright ends up at the wrong terminus:

One is not justified by faith by believing in justification by faith. One is justified by believing in Jesus.¹² It follows quite clearly that a great many people are justified by faith who don't know they are justified by faith... Many Christians today may not be very clear about the niceties of doctrine; but, however inarticulately, they hold on to Jesus; and, according to Paul's teaching, they are therefore justified by faith. They are constituted as members of the family. They must be treated as such. This is not to say, of course, that justification is an unimportant or inessential doctrine. Far from it. A church that does not grasp it and teach it is heading for trouble.¹³

I agree with that last understatement! But if we do not appreciate and preach the biblical doctrine of justification by faith, if we do not preach it in a biblical way, and, above all, if we – personally and individually – have not been justified by faith, we are more than 'heading' for trouble; we are in it!

Continuing with Wright, where, in his view, does this leave faith? After all, 'faith' is a huge word in the New Testament. So, under the New Perspective, what place is there for faith? What is going on when a sinner believes? When God speaks of faith being essential (Heb. 11:6), what is he calling for? Wright:

¹¹ Although it is not a million miles from Sandemanianism.

¹² This needs spelling out. As it stands, the statement is inadequate. It could be nothing other than Sandemanianism.

¹³ Wright p159. A case of glasshouses and stones?

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Faith... is never and in no way a qualification, provided from the human side... for getting into God's family... It is the God-given badge of membership, neither more nor less.¹⁴

I could not more decidedly disagree. While I do agree, of course, that faith does not earn our place among God's children, it is far, far more than a mere membership 'badge'. It is the way in! Let me stress this. God justifies the sinner when he believes, and through his believing, but he never justifies a sinner because he believes, on account of his faith. The basis, the ground, of the sinner's justification is the finished work of Christ, and that alone; it is not faith! Again, the moving cause of justification is the free grace and sovereign love of God; it is not faith! Nevertheless, until a sinner believes, he is not justified. He is only justified as he trusts Christ and his redeeming work. While faith is not the cause or basis of justification, it most definitely is the means of justification.

Consider just two passages, two out of scores. See if they teach that faith is a 'badge':

By the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the law and the prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood, through faith, to demonstrate his righteousness... that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law (Rom. 3:20-28).

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified (Gal. 2:16).

Faith a 'badge'? Rubbish! Faith is more the door – not the sticker they affix to your lapel at the door, confirming that you are a genuine guest! The wedding garment in the parable (Matt. 22:2-14)

¹⁴ Wright p160.

represents, not faith, but the perfect justifying-righteousness of Christ, received by faith at conversion, and the subsequent living of it out in a godly life. Unless a sinner trusts Christ for salvation, he is under the wrath of God, under condemnation, outside the people of God, cut off from God and without hope (John 3:18-19,36; Eph. 2:1-3,11-12). He must be converted. And he is converted when the Spirit regenerates him and leads him to repentance and faith.

And what about imputed righteousness (Rom. 5:19; 2 Cor. 5:21)? According to Wright, the traditional view of imputed righteousness is a nonsense, verging on – if not actually getting to be – ‘a legal fiction’: ‘If we use the language of the law court, it makes no sense whatever to say that the judge imputes... his righteousness to... the defendant’.¹⁵ Strong and definite may be his words, but Wright’s sentiment is itself patent nonsense.¹⁶ As the New Testament declares:

But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed... even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood, through faith, to demonstrate... at the present time his righteousness, that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:21-26).

[Christ] was delivered up because of our offences, and was raised because of our justification (Rom. 4:25).

As by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous (Rom. 5:19).

God... [sent] his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: he condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us (Rom. 8:3-4).

Christ Jesus... became for us wisdom from God... righteousness and sanctification and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

¹⁵ Wright pp98,102.

¹⁶ I will not substantiate my claim here. The arguments have been well-rehearsed and firmly established times without number.

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[God] made [Christ] who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor. 5:21).

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (Gal. 3:13).

These passages surely speak for themselves. As really as those in Adam are made sinners in and through Adam, so those in Christ really are made righteous in Christ. This is no ‘fiction’. Fiction, indeed! I stress the ‘really’ or ‘actually’. Men are really made sinners in Adam; sinners are really made righteous in Christ. And sinners are made righteous in Christ because Christ really did take their sin and guilt and punishment, and God really does give them (that is, he imputes to them) Christ’s righteousness. This, I say again, is no fiction. Rather, to borrow Philip Eveson’s use of the phrase, it is ‘the great exchange’.¹⁷ More! It is the *glorious* exchange!

Now for Wright’s view of conversion. Under the New Perspective, what place for individual conversion? Wright certainly holds to individual conversion: ‘*Of course*’, he says, ‘every single human being is summoned... to respond personally to the gospel. Nobody in their right mind would deny that’.¹⁸ But – and there is a huge ‘but’ – what really matters here is what we understand by ‘response’. We must allow no muddle here. We must be clear about it! The New Testament is categorical: the only saving response to the gospel is conviction of sin leading to repentance and faith. *That* is the response God calls for: trust in Christ. For it is as he trusts Christ, that the sinner is justified. And in no other way. Is this what Wright means by ‘response’. No, it is not!

I will make the point by moving on to yet another massive ‘but’ in Wright’s statement. What really counts for Wright is the ‘community’. The traditional, Reformed, evangelical view – with its emphasis upon individual, personal conversion – is, according to Wright, quite wrong. It is all a question of the ‘community’:

¹⁷ Philip H.Eveson: *The Great Exchange: Justification by Faith Alone*, Day One Publications, Leominster, 2005.

¹⁸ Wright p158, emphasis his. Wright went on: ‘Nobody in their right mind would deny that. But...’.

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If you take the old route of putting justification, in its traditional [Reformed] meaning, at the centre of your theology, you will always be in danger of sustaining some sort of individualism.¹⁹

Do not miss the ‘individualism’. Let me assert at once that I am not saying that there is no corporate emphasis in the New Testament – of course not! – nevertheless, until we have had a personal experience of conversion and justification by faith, talk of the corporate is entirely misplaced. If I may illustrate: if the horse is the personal, the cart is the corporate; to put the corporate before the personal is not only daft – it’s dangerous.

There is a corporate aspect to the gospel, yes, a glorious one at that. God in Christ has established a new Israel, formed out of Jew and Gentile, yes. As Paul, writing to the Ephesians, declared:

Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in his flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that he might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And he came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (Eph. 2:11-22).

Clearly, then, there is a corporate aspect to the gospel. I go further. I admit that we evangelicals and Reformed have not made enough of it. We have been guilty of so stressing the individual that we have lost sight too often of the corporate. Yes! To this extent,

¹⁹ Wright pp157-158.

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Wright has a valuable point to make. He has certainly nailed me! And I am grateful for the rebuke, and the reminder that I need to think more of the corporate.

Nevertheless, the corporate is not the be-all and end-all of the gospel. What is more, as I have explained, until we have been personally and individually converted, all talk of the corporate is entirely misplaced. And this is the point! In fact, it takes us to the very heart of the problem or attack we are looking at. Indeed, this is the crunch point for all the threats to conversion that I mentioned earlier. This is the issue infant baptisers have to face. It is the issue Baptist sacramentalists have to face. It is the issue inclusivists have to face. It is the issue to be faced by these who preach salvation by works – whether overtly or by default.²⁰

Sinners are not joined to Christ in a kind of osmosis. Nor is it a kind of mass movement. Every converted sinner becomes a member of the body of Christ in an individual and personal way by conversion. We are not born Christians. We do not drift into Christ. We do not catch justification like the measles! We do not get it by association with believers! We must, as individuals, come to a ‘crisis’ and be converted.

In saying this, I would not be misunderstood. By ‘crisis’ I do not mean something necessarily dramatic. Nevertheless, conversion is not a process. It is a crisis.²¹ There is a before and an after. The New Testament emphasis can only be missed by those who are determined not to see it. While there is a corporate dimension to the gospel, it is personal conversion which comes first, and it is personal conversion which is paramount. Until we have had that experience, all talk of ‘belonging’ is wishful thinking.

²⁰ As for Sandemanians, they do hold to conversion – but they reduce it to a mere change of mind about the facts of the gospel. Before ‘conversion’, you don’t accept the facts of the gospel; after ‘conversion’ you do. This ruins conversion, but not in the same way as the other attacks. Even so, the end result for sinners is the same. Whereas there is only one way to heaven, there are many roads to hell.

²¹ By ‘crisis’ I mean ‘a time when something very important for the future happens or is decided’ (*Encarta*). And by ‘time’ I do not mean ‘process’. I am speaking of an occasion, an event, a juncture, a point in time.

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Let me prove it. Let me prove that the New Testament emphasises the individual. Take the apostle writing to the Ephesians; I have just quoted him, at length, speaking of the corporate. What did he say to them when setting out the corporate? How did the Ephesians become members of this new community? It was as Paul reminded them:

You... were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit... God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast (Eph. 1:13; 2:4-9, NIV).

Peter made the same point when he, mixing his metaphors, likened the corporate body of Christ to a temple and to a nation.²² Notice how the apostle set out the way in which this temple or nation is built – namely by the conversion of individual sinners, they being added as individual ‘stones’ to the temple, or individual ‘citizens’ to the nation:

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious. Coming to him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... You are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy (1 Pet. 2:2-10).

Wright, however, virtually dismisses the individual experience:

²² Don't worry about the mixed metaphors! The Spirit, inspiring Scripture, did not mind breaking our rules of grammar and linguistic style!

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Tragically, some would-be presentations of 'the gospel' have actually bought into this, by implying that one is justified or saved first and foremost as an individual.²³

Note well Wright's words – emphasising justification by faith as an individual through conversion is 'tragic'! This is the wrong terminus I spoke of. Tragic? Without individual and personal justification by faith in the Redeemer, the sinner will be damned for ever!²⁴

So what does Wright think of Paul's conversion? Paul was converted, wasn't he? Well, what really happened to that rabid Jew on the Damascus road? We know that Saul, as he then was, started the day, as he had for some considerable time past, obsessed with the destruction of Christ and all he stood for, determined to set about it by annihilating Christ's followers. As Saul came within sight of his destination, the next on his list for carrying out his soul-consuming passion, something happened to him, something which changed his entire life. What? Wright:

Paul's awareness of Jesus as having been bodily raised from the dead is of paramount importance in understanding the significance of what happened to him on the road to Damascus. It will not do, historically speaking, to spiritualise or psychologise the event, as though (for instance) Saul had been labouring with a troubled conscience for years and suddenly had a great religious experience which enabled him to throw off the burden and enjoy a new level or dimension of spiritual existence. Nor will it do simply to say, as so many have done, (a) that Saul of Tarsus had formerly regarded the crucified Jesus as cursed by the Jewish law; (b) that he then realised that God had reversed the law's curse; so (c) he realised that the law was now shown up as bankrupt and out of date, and (d) he could begin to announce to the world that there was a way of being the people of God in which the law played no role. Even if any of this carries a grain of truth, it is not central to what was going on.²⁵

'If any of this carries a grain of truth'? Oh? So, I ask again: What, according to Wright, *did* happen to Paul outside Damascus? Just this:

²³ Wright pp157-158.

²⁴ See above.

²⁵ Wright p36.

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The significance of Jesus' resurrection, for Saul of Tarsus as he lay blinded and perhaps bruised on the road to Damascus, was this: The one true God had done for Jesus of Nazareth, in the middle of time, what Saul had thought he was going to do for Israel at the end of time.²⁶

Let me reply. Wright's estimate of Paul's conversion is woefully at odds with the weight of scriptural evidence. Let me summarise Wright's view: Saul, before the Damascus road experience, was personally right with God because he was in covenant with God by being a member of the nation of Israel. It is just that he did not understand God's purpose in sending Jesus as the Messiah. He did not realise that when Jesus died and rose again, he ushered in a glorious future for Israel, a future that had been so often promised in the Old Testament, and for which Saul himself was longing. While he himself was right with God – certainly, he was not labouring under any sense of sin, or doing all he could to get right with God – he *was* labouring under a gross misunderstanding about Christ. It was all a question of misunderstanding, you see. When Christ confronted him on the way to Damascus, this was changed, changed dramatically, and changed irreversibly. Saul came to realise that the one he was persecuting was in fact the very one who had brought about the thing he most desired – the glorious age for Israel. Saul saw the light! He came to see how utterly stupid he had been. Here he was, reading the Old Testament, poring over it, longing for the fulfilment of the promises of a glorious future for Israel – so often spoken of by the prophets – and now, right under his nose, the Messiah had come, accomplished God's purpose, and was fulfilling those promises, and yet he, Saul, had failed to spot it! The one he was trying to destroy was the very one who was fulfilling his every hope! How wrong could one be! What a fool he had been! *That* is what Saul came to see when Christ confronted him on the road to Damascus.

Saul's conversion was *not* a change of status before God! Not at all! It was a change of viewpoint. Christ cleared out the clutter in Saul's mental baggage. So much so, Saul could now see Christ for who and what he really was – the one who had accomplished

²⁶ Wright p36.

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God's purpose for Israel. Indeed, he now realised that it was even greater than he had ever imagined. He could now see that God's purpose was not confined to Israel. It dawned on him that the Gentiles, too, were included. And these two – Jews and Gentiles – under Christ were to form the new man, the new Israel, the new community of God. But this new Israel would be very different to the old Israel. In the new Israel, there would be no place for those old separating laws which were so important in Judaism – laws concerning circumcision, diet and days. All that was gone, gone for ever, swept away by the Messiah. And his (Saul's) job from now on was not to persecute Christ, but to bring Gentiles to see what the Messiah had accomplished in setting up the new Israel. Not only that: his job was to urge them not to stand aloof, but to come and join the new community. *That*, from now on, was to be Saul's consuming passion – the encouraging of Jew and Gentile to enter the one new community under Christ. It was nothing to do with personal conviction of sin and trusting Christ and all that. Not at all! It was a question of getting people to recognise this new Israel, and to want to come and join it – a new Israel with none of the old restrictions of the law, all of which had been fulfilled and abolished in Christ. And if only the people would come to recognise this, if only they would come and join this new community and 'hold on to Jesus',²⁷ then they would be justified!

So much for Saul (Paul) – whose name (as so much else) was changed by his encounter with the risen Christ that day. But what about us? What bearing, according to Wright, does this have on us?

It has a tremendous bearing on us. You see, according to the New Perspective, for centuries we evangelicals and Reformed have been labouring under a dreadful misapprehension – rather like Saul, himself, come to think of it. We have been obsessed by the notion – the false notion – that justification by faith means a conversion, a conversion that involves personal and individual conviction of sin, repentant trust in Christ, and the beginning of a new life of progressive holiness. This, however, misses the mark by a mile! It

²⁷ Wright p159. I have changed Wright's words from the past tense.

is all a dreadful misunderstanding – nothing but a throwback to the bad old days of Martin Luther. We need our Damascus road experience. What we must do is this: we must rid ourselves of Luther's rigmarole about personal justification and imputed righteousness. We have to realise that it is all a question of belonging to the community of God's people. Justification is to do with God being faithful to his covenant people, the new Israel. It is the community that counts. It is all a question of recognising this new community and our part in it. We must divest ourselves of all this Reformed emphasis on the personal and individual, get rid of this regrettable left-over from poor old Luther, crippled as he was with his psychological neurosis. We must get it into our heads that it is all about the community, belonging to the community, recognising that we belong to the community. Moreover, we have to see this New Perspective for what it is: the great hope, especially in the ecumenical world. After all, this new view of justification, according to Wright:

Is not merely a doctrine which Catholic and Protestant might just be able to agree on, as a result of hard ecumenical endeavour. It is itself the ecumenical doctrine... [This new] doctrine of justification is in fact the great ecumenical doctrine.²⁸

Well, this has let the cat out of the bag, good and proper! Now we know.

Let me say at once how much I admire Wright's clarity; he is perceptive, acute; indeed, he is spot on! And I am glad he states the position so clearly. As he observes, this is where the New Perspective is making such a valuable contribution in the quest for the great ecumenical Church. This newly-defined justification – both in its doctrine and practice, especially its practice – 'is itself the ecumenical doctrine... the great ecumenical doctrine'. Of course it is! For those who want it, that is!

This is the crux. This is where the New Perspective, infant baptism, Baptist sacramentalism, inclusivism and the preaching of salvation by works come together. It's all leading to one end. I have no doubt about it myself. I can see it in my mind's eye. Once

²⁸ Wright p158.

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the master-cooks have gathered all their ingredients, thoroughly mixed and baked the dough, then, with a suitable flourish, they will be able to present us with the great ecumenical cake. Conversion? No need of conversion, then! All talk of conversion will be a thing of the past. In this coming utopia, if you are curious about that old-fashioned thing called ‘conversion’ – that which those suppressed fuddy-duddies used to talk so much about in the bad old days – well, you’ll just have to trot along to the museum and stare at it. There it will be, pinned to its card, grinning helplessly at you through the plate glass. Have no fear: you will be quite safe; it will be securely locked in its cage. And for those who are really determined to learn about ‘conversion’, no doubt there will be the virtual-reality experience to enjoy – much as we today can go to the medieval castle to wander through the dungeons and gawk at all the grisly apparatus of torture: nice for a diversion on a wet afternoon, of course, but how glad we are when we get out of the gloomy cavern, and escape once more into the fresh air! We can sigh with relief, and congratulate ourselves that we today have grown up – and grown out of it all!

Nonsense! Diabolical nonsense!

The point is, of course, the ‘grain of truth’ which Wright dismissed is, in fact, the biblical reality. Saul *had* been labouring under a guilty conscience, zealously doing what he thought was God’s will, and doing it to try to stifle his nagging doubts – ever since, if not before, he witnessed Stephen’s death by stoning (Acts 7:58; 8:1). In truth, the more he did, the busier he was, the less time he had to think.²⁹ But all that was changed in that dramatic encounter with the risen Christ. When Christ confronted Saul on the road to Damascus, and later in the city itself, he brought home to him his sin, reminding him of his pricking conscience (Acts 26:14), thereby convicting him of his personal guilt in his sin. More than that, the Lord dealt with Saul’s sin in an individual way. Saul was brought, as an individual, to submit to Christ as Lord. And as Saul experienced the forgiveness of his sins, he was filled with the

²⁹ It seems to me that Saul’s enforced three-day (lonely and frightening) blindness (Acts 9:9) played its part in making him stop and think.

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Spirit. Furthermore, Christ as Lord told him that his future work was to preach the gospel – the message of the forgiveness of sins, and all the rest, through repentance and faith in Christ. See, for instance, Acts 9:1-22; 22:1-21; 26:1-29. From that time on, Paul was a man under authority, the authority of the Lord Christ. As Paul himself testified:

For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it. And I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the Gentiles... (Gal. 1:13-16).

We are the circumcision, who worship God in the Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh, though I also might have confidence in the flesh. If anyone else thinks he may have confidence in the flesh, I more so: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me (Phil. 3:3-12).

The glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust... I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus

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Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on him for everlasting life (1 Tim. 1:11-16).

For a commentary on all this, I can only suggest a thorough reading of the letters of Paul. In light of which I further suggest a candid assessment of Wright's position must lead to only one conclusion. Wright gets it wrong, woefully so!

How does Wright view the rest of Paul's life, after his conversion?

Saul's vision on the road to Damascus thus equipped him with an entirely new perspective, though one that kept its roots firm and deep within his previous covenantal theology.³⁰ Israel's destiny had been summed up and achieved in Jesus the Messiah. The Age to Come had been inaugurated. Saul himself was summoned to be its agent. He was to declare to the pagan world that YHWH, the God of Israel, was the one true God of the whole world, and that Jesus of Nazareth had overcome evil and was creating a new world in which justice and peace would reign supreme.³¹

I can only say that my reading of the New Testament shows Paul engaged in a very different ministry to that envisaged by Wright. It can be summed up – it ought to be summed up – in the commission that Christ gave him on the road outside Damascus:

Rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you. I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you, to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in me (Acts 26:16-18).

Paul never forgot those words! They were burned into his very heart and mind! They were burned into his very soul! And he acted upon them – at once! What is more, he never stopped! We know this because, when addressing Agrippa, immediately after quoting Christ's commission, the apostle went straight on to assert:

³⁰ That is, Jewish – not Reformed – covenant theology!

³¹ Wright p37.

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Therefore, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus and in Jerusalem, and throughout all the region of Judea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent, turn to God, and do works befitting repentance (Acts 26:19-20).

Indeed, that was precisely the reason why the Jews hated him so deeply: ‘For these reasons the Jews seized me in the temple and tried to kill me’ (Acts 26:21). Undaunted, the apostle was determined to carry out Christ’s commission to the letter, and to his last breath (2 Tim. 4:6-7):

Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great, saying no other things than those which the prophets and Moses said would come – that the Christ would suffer, that he would be the first to rise from the dead, and would proclaim light to the Jewish people and to the Gentiles (Acts 26:22-23).

And, lest there should be any doubt – but read the New Testament and see – Paul spent his life fulfilling Christ’s final command to all his people, and doing so with all the ramifications and nuances intended by the Lord:

All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).

Let me quote one passage to prove it. Paul, in a hurry to get back to Jerusalem, desperately longed to address the Ephesian elders just once more. He knew that serious danger was threatening the Ephesian church, and he wanted to do all he could to prevent it. Torn between his desire to get to Jerusalem and the urgent need at Ephesus, he sent for the elders, and they came to meet him at Miletus. It was the apostle’s last anxious throw.

Let us hear part of what the apostle left ringing in the ears of the elders that day. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit recorded these words through Luke, and they have not been lost in the wind. In our degenerate day, we, weltering under attack after attack on the conversion of sinners, must heed the apostle’s appeal to the men of Ephesus. This is what he said then, and this is what he says today:

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You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews. You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. And now, compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there. I only know that in every city the Holy Spirit warns me that prison and hardships are facing me. However, I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me – the task of testifying to the gospel of God’s grace. Now I know that none of you among whom I have gone about preaching the kingdom will ever see me again. Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God (Acts 20:17-27, NIV).

Paul uttered those words long ago to the leaders at Ephesus. And he says it today to us.

I cannot resist quoting just a little more from the apostle. In light of what I have been saying, it seems to me most apposite:

Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified (Acts 20:28-32, NIV).

I appeal to you, reader, compare the apostle’s words with the claims of the New Perspective. I appeal to every elder or preacher who reads this book of mine to heed Paul’s plea to the Ephesian elders in the face of error. May all of us who profess the name of Christ not only defend the biblical doctrine of conversion, but do all we can to call as many sinners as possible to obey the command of Christ. This is how he preached; this is what he declared: ‘Repent and believe the good news!’ (Mark 1:14, NIV).

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This, then, should be our settled aim and determination. Mark recorded Christ's words, not as a one-off, surely, but as a succinct summary of the substance of the Saviour's constant preaching. May it be ours! As Agrippa felt the force of Paul's words – 'I would to God that not only you, but also all who hear me today, might become both almost and altogether such as I am' (Acts 26:29) – may those who hear us know that we, in our turn, have longed for *their* conversion.

Conclusion

I hope, reader, that this glance at Wright's teaching has demonstrated that when the doctrine of justification by faith is changed, the Church becomes more important than salvation; 'belonging' becomes more important than 'believing'; and, above all, the biblical doctrine of conversion is degraded. Wright, arguing for the New Perspective view of justification, has played havoc with conversion. In time, his doctrine will play havoc with souls. He is not alone, of course. Whoever, for whatever reason, and on whatever basis, tinkers with justification by faith, that man and his doctrine are a threat to the biblical doctrine of conversion. And when conversion is degraded, the consequences to countless men and women will be horrendous. They are horrendous.

I come closer to home. As I have argued, incipient Sandemanianism is plaguing us, and Sandemanianism stifles conversion. As a word, 'Sandemanianism' may be largely unknown; but not, I am afraid, as a deadening experience. Things have to change. We cannot go on in this withered state. Nevertheless, since the desolation caused by Sandemanianism is not my main concern here, I leave it there.

I turn, instead, to address the way our diminished sense of justification seriously weakens our view of conversion, and our preaching for it.

I contend that many of us believers today are suffering from a woefully inadequate view of the fullness of God's grace in free justification by faith in Christ. This has to be put right. We must get to grips with this glorious biblical doctrine, and let it get a grip of us – our heart, mind and will. And then, having a renewed sense of the wonder of our own justification in Christ, we must state the glorious truth to others, clearly and unequivocally, preaching it with heartfelt passion, contending for it with unwavering tenacity, offering Christ and all his benefits as warmly, as freely, and as widely as we can.

And, in light of all this, we have to insist on personal conversion. Eternal consequences hang upon it – especially for those who hear us. But not only for them. If we fail to carry out

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Christ's commission, *we* too shall have to answer to our master (Ezek. 3:18-21; 33:7-9).

For the truth is stark: unless a sinner trusts Christ, he will perish eternally in his sin. But the gospel is amazing: the moment a sinner turns from his sin, forsaking all his own efforts to make himself right with God, and casts himself in faith upon the Lord Jesus Christ, pleading his blood and righteousness, he is at once and for ever washed from his sin and accounted righteous in God's sight. He is from that moment in Christ, and is, therefore, beyond all condemnation. Outside of Christ, however, there remains nothing but condemnation.

Two short passages of Scripture must suffice. Reader, if you have not yet trusted Christ, in light of these words, I urge you to do so at once. Feel the warmth of God's invitation to you – yes, to you. Yield to God's invitation and command, even now. Do so at once:

Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's only begotten Son... Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him (John 3:14-18,36, NIV).

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. We then, as workers together with him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain. For he says: 'In an acceptable time I have heard you, and in the day of salvation I have helped you'. Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation (2 Cor. 5:19 – 6:2).

It is all here. God sees the sinner lost, ruined and helpless in his sin. Staggeringly, even though sin has violated his holiness, out of his great love for sinners, and in his infinite grace, God sent his

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Son into the world, not to condemn sinners, but to die for them, in their place. And now God, through his servants, pleads with sinners – pleads with you this very moment, even as you read these words – to come to him and receive this full and free justification wrought by Christ. And he assures you that all who trust in Christ and his atoning sacrifice are for ever right with God. More, he assures *you* that if *you* trust the Saviour, he will receive *you*, and save *you*. If you will not trust Christ, however, you will perish. And, I must tell you, reader, to refuse God's offer of mercy in Christ is the highest sin of all.

I have not been tackling the New Perspective and the conversion of sinners for the fun of it. I could not have been handling a more serious subject. As I close let me ask you: Are you converted? Have you seen yourself as a ruined, hopeless sinner, and have you fled to Jesus for refuge (Heb. 6:18)? If you have, you are justified, utterly for ever free from condemnation, and as such you have peace with God (Rom. 5:1). If not, however... if not, you are yet in your sins.

I cannot leave it there. I must take it further. I plead with you, do not leave it there! Come to Christ! Come now! Your need is immense, but Christ's love, grace and power are infinite. He is willing to save you. Are you willing to come to him and receive his salvation? Come, I urge you, come to Christ. Come without delay!